

**From:** [Thabault, Michael](#)  
**To:** [Noreen Walsh](#)  
**Cc:** [Matt Kales](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Revised draft state plan status briefing for Secretary - CO question  
**Date:** Monday, November 25, 2013 8:21:37 AM

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I believe this accurately reflects the situation.

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On Sat, Nov 23, 2013 at 9:21 AM, Noreen Walsh <[noreen\\_walsh@fws.gov](mailto:noreen_walsh@fws.gov)> wrote:

Matt and Mike,

Thanks to you and all the project leaders for the extraordinary effort to get this done this past week – I am deeply appreciative. I will be sending it on to Gary and Dan this weekend. First I must ask you about the CO section.

I found the CO section to be lengthy and confusing. Also, in it, we highlight grazing. All of the conversations I have been in on this topic have reaffirmed that while the COT report labeled grazing as a threat in several populations, we believe it is localized and not widespread. Please tell me if this has changed. I also want to acknowledge in our summary that we gave them strong feedback on the COGCC rules and they listened and have contracted for a thorough review.

I would like our summary to be inclusive of strengths and weaknesses, yet to focus on or emphasize those points that matter most, that we want to be the take home message. Please take a look at this revision for CO and let me know if you believe it is inaccurate in any way.

Thanks,

Noreen

**State:** Colorado

**State plan status:** Colorado completed its *Colorado Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation Plan* in 2008. The state is assessing implementation of the 2008 plan, but is not currently planning to revise or amend it at this point.

Information on implementation of the plan to date has been compiled by the Colorado Division of Natural Resources over this past year and is referred to as the “Colorado Package.” The Colorado Package is a series of tables summarizing the responses of stakeholders detailing what they have done to implement the plan since its completion in 2008. Some strategies contained in the plan have been initiated, some completed, and others have not yet been attempted (such as adoption of county land use regulations).

**State’s assessment of their plan:** Colorado has not yet finalized its self-assessment.

**FWS assessment of state plan:** The Colorado state plan is strong on biology and strategies needed to conserve Greater sage-grouse (GrSGS). Some of the positive aspects include the acquisition of numerous conservation easements, the many acres of habitat treated to benefit GRSG, and the development of oil and gas permitting rules with increased wildlife protection. The state plan identifies 18 issues (threats) to GrSG, including oil and gas development and housing development as important issues. While grazing was identified as a threat, it appears to be a localized issue, not widespread.

Implementation of the strategies in the plan is voluntary; thus, implementation has been, and likely will continue to be, sporadic. Oil and gas development is a significant issue. The final report from the GrSG Conservation Objectives Team (COT) recommends that energy development be avoided in Primary Areas for Conservation (PACs), or if avoidance is not possible, the best habitat should be avoided to ensure that GrSG populations do not decline. GrSG protections from oil and gas development are imposed by the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC) during the permit application and issuance process. Colorado Parks and Wildlife (CPW) staff make conservation recommendations to COGCC on oil and gas development applications that might affect GrSG. FWS believes these recommendations are, as a rule, sufficiently protective of GrSG., however, the implementation of those recommendations is discretionary and permits continue to be issued for oil and gas drilling in PACs. It is not clear that the best GrSG habitats are always avoided. The state review was unable to comprehensively identify which recommendations, if any, have been implemented. We indicated to the state that this deficiency in recordkeeping is a weakness in our ability to consider those regulations as providing certainty of conservation. Thus, they have since contracted for a thorough review

of their files to investigate whether CPW recommendations are being implemented, but the results won't be known until January.

Exurban development is not much of a threat to some GrSG populations in Colorado, but it is a slowly developing, long-term threat to others. Individual county governments regulate housing development. Some counties take GrSG conservation into consideration when reviewing housing development applications, some do not.

Noreen Walsh

Regional Director

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**From:** Matt Kales [mailto:[matt\\_kales@fws.gov](mailto:matt_kales@fws.gov)]

**Sent:** Friday, November 22, 2013 12:42 PM

**To:** Noreen Walsh

**Cc:** Michael Thabault; Nicole Alt; Pat Deibert; Theresa Rabot; Jesse DElia; [michael\\_fris@fws.gov](mailto:michael_fris@fws.gov)

**Subject:** Revised draft state plan status briefing for Secretary

**Importance:** High

Noreen,

Please find attached the subject document, which contains updates on the subject information for all 11 states. Please let me know if I can further assist with this item.  
Thanks. Matt

**Matt Kales**

**Special Assistant for Greater Sage-Grouse Conservation**

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